

Rep. Louise M. Slaughter

January 3, 2013

113th Congress Opening Session

I thank the gentleman for yielding me the customary 30 minutes, and I yield myself such time as I may consume.

M./ Speaker,

I'd like to begin by congratulating my colleague Mr. Sessions for his new role as Chairman of the Rules Committee. I've have worked alongside Mr. Sessions for years, and I look forward to working closely with him over the months and years to come.

M./ Speaker, the opening day of any new session of Congress is an opportunity for a fresh start- and today is no different. As the 113th session of Congress gets underway, my Democratic colleagues and I stand ready to work with the Majority in a truly bipartisan way to deliver results for the American people.

Our work begins with the adoption of a rules package that will set the standard for the next two years.

At the start of the 112th Congress, the Majority promised a new era of openness and transparency and a willingness to "let the House work its will".

Unfortunately the rhetoric was not matched by reality. Under the Majority's leadership one third of all proposals brought to the House floor were considered under a closed process.

In addition, the Majority repeatedly presided over an extreme agenda and pursued political goals with a brinksmanship that endangered our economy and led to the first-ever downgrade to our nation's credit.

This type of brinksmanship resulted to the 112th Congress being the least productive in our nation's history. As we start the 113th Congress the Majority has the opportunity to put the failed legislative process of the past behind and finally govern in a truly open and transparent way. If they do, we will be able to deliver on the promise of a collaborative and bipartisan House.

Unfortunately, in looking at the proposed Rules of the 113th Congress, there are signs that an open, transparent and bipartisan Congress may not come to pass.

There are a number of troubling provisions within the Rules package that should give any Member of Congress cause for concern.

Perhaps most troubling is the proposal to once again adopt the Ryan Budget in these early days of Congress. Doing so would be yet another attack on the Affordable Care Act. By adopting the Ryan Budget the Majority will attempt to repeal multiple provisions of the Affordable Care Act, including the Affordable Care Acts' penalties on high-cost health plans. These penalties are an important cost-control measure that are vital to lowering the cost of healthcare. By repealing these penalties the Majority would gut the healthcare law, leaving it effectively useless in our continuing effort to lower the cost of healthcare in the United States.

These attacks on the Affordable Care Act are a continuation of the political games of the 112th Congress. Over the last two years, the Majority voted 33 times to repeal the Affordable Care Act, despite knowing full well that their votes would never become law. Their repeated votes wasted valuable time in the 112th

Congress and according to CBS News cost taxpayers close to \$50 million dollars. I am extremely troubled to see that the Majority continues to waste our time with an ideologically

driven campaign that has no chance of success.

In addition to an ideological attack on the healthcare law, today's rules package includes provisions to continue the Majority's so called "Fast and Furious" campaign and their work to support the Defense of Marriage Act before the courts. Both of these efforts are ideological campaigns that should not be conducted on the taxpayer's dime.

Finally, with today's legislation, the Majority proposes loosening the ethics rules regarding the use of private aircraft by Members of Congress and their staffs. Does the Majority really believe that one of our first orders of business should be loosening ethics rules in the halls of Congress?

It is my sincere hope that the proposals before us today do not reflect the priorities of the Majority over the next two years. For instead of doubling down on a failed agenda, we should be fixing the most pressing issues facing our nation today.

The Majority could start today by joining my Democratic colleagues and I in finally reforming our broken electoral system.

In the years since the Supreme Court handed down its ruling in the case of Citizens United, unlimited amounts of money from billionaires and hidden special interests have flooded our elections and threatened to corrupt our electoral process. At the same time, a concerted effort has been launched throughout the country to disenfranchise American citizens through laws that make it harder for perfectly qualified individuals to exercise their right to vote.

Led by billionaires like Sheldon Adelson and secret political spending that is hidden from public view, wealthy special interests have tried to buy our airwaves, fund campaigns, and launch political attacks to sway the outcome of countless elections.

The Sunlight Foundation reports that during the 2011 election cycle alone, Super PACs spent more than \$620 million on our federal elections.

Let me say loud and clear, corporations are NOT people, and should not be afforded the same rights to participate in our electoral process.

Later today my Democratic colleagues and I hope to introduce a constitutional amendment to the House Floor for a vote. The amendment will overturn the flawed Citizens United decision and remove the unlimited and untracked political donations from Super PACs and the wealthy interests who seek to purchase the democratic process for their own private gain.

In addition to addressing the uncontrolled money in our political process, this Congress should be ensuring that every American citizen can easily exercise their right to vote.

Voting is fundamental to what it means to be an American, yet in recent years we've seen a concerted effort by some across our country to suppress the votes of those with whom they disagree.

By falsely claiming that voter fraud is a threat to our democracy, these political operatives have methodically advanced a number of discriminatory and dangerous pieces of legislation. Their methods range from unfair voter ID laws to the reduction in the number of voting machines in low-income neighborhoods. No matter the method, their goals are the same: to make it as hard as possible, or even impossible, for everyday Americans to vote.

Unfortunately these discriminatory laws have indeed made it harder and harder for citizens to vote. This November there were reports from voters that they were turned away from the polls. And for those who did manage to vote, they were often had to wait in line for hours before they could enter the voting booth and cast a ballot.

When taken together, the overwhelming influence of money in politics and the discriminatory attacks on Americans' right to vote have distorted our electoral system and helped to create a broken legislative process that is failing to serve the American public.

It is vital that Congress finally act to fix our system and live up to our history as the greatest democracy on Earth.

As we open the 113th Congress, my Democratic colleagues and I stand ready to work with the Majority on fixing our broken electoral system and creating a bipartisan legislative process that is worthy of the citizens who sent us here today.

Later today we will offer a motion to commit with instructions to give the House a vote on the SIMPLE Voting Act. This legislation would guarantee that no voter would have to wait more than one hour to cast their ballot, and require every polling station in the country have the resources it needs to run a smooth and fair election.

Now is our opportunity, and we can't afford to walk away. I urge the Majority to truly govern in an open, transparent and bipartisan manner, and I hope that we can join together in delivering solutions for the American people.

I RESERVE the balance of my time.